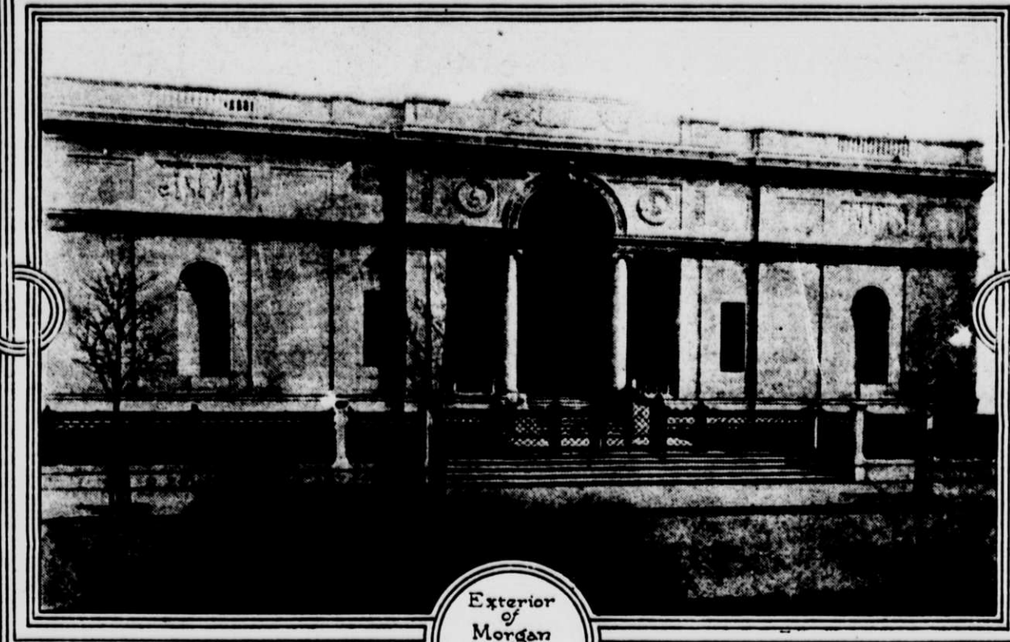
CHARLES F. McKIM, WHO LIVED AND WORKED FOR OTHERS

INTERIOR



Exterior of Morgan Library, New York

VESTIBULE

Famous Architect Never Had Time to Do Anything for His Own Personal Gratification—Morgan Library a Monument to Him and to J. P. Morgan

By JEANNETTE L. GILDER.

A BOOK that interests me greatly is "Charles Follen McKim," by Alfred Hoyt Granger (Houghton Mifflin). The book is a study of the life and work of this famous architect and is dedicated to William Rutherford Mead, "the last of a great triumvirate."

Wherever art or architecture is known the firm name of McKim, Mead & White is a household word. They were the pacemakers for scores of other architects and did more to revolutionize taste in buildings, public and private, than any other architects that this country has known. Mr. Granger has written an appreciative survey of Mr. McKim's work and he has written an equally appreciative chapter on "McKim, the Man." Adequately to express "McKim, the Man" he considers a far more difficult matter than to consider "McKim's Life and Work." To quote Mr. Granger:

"To those who knew and loved him the man was a far greater influence than his work. Even slight acquaintances realized this because of the subtle power of his personality. His whole life has been best described in one trenchant sentence of his only surviving partner, Mr. Mead, which I have quoted on the title page of this book, 'Perfection in whatever he undertook.'"

Of Mr. McKim in his later days Mr. Granger writes:

"Handsome, reserved, dignified, full of reposeful charm, the McKim whom the younger men of his profession only met to revere and love was the product of a life of rigid discipline, strenuous work and constant self-denial. In his youth he bubbled over with fun and animal spirits. As he grew older these same spirits were curbed and held in check by an invincible will and a mind of very lofty purity and became the tools by which he achieved his highest successes. His sense of fun and of the joy of life he never lost."

Mr. Granger continues:

"Among his friends of his own age McKim was always the genial, urbane gentleman, but the natural reserve of his temperament, which seemed to increase with the years, made his conversation even among intimates somewhat formal and dignified. With younger men he was able to throw off this reserve, to accept and enter into their point of view. He never forgot the dreams and struggles of his own youth and so was ever ready to give himself to help younger architects to arrive.

"Without apparently seeming to do so he watched the development of each man in his office who had shown any possibilities of creative work and when he felt that this one or that had reached the point where he could develop more rapidly in personal practice it was McKim's custom to secure for this man some job and thus enable him to start out for himself. It would be difficult to recall the exact number of successful practising architects who were thus launched through his kindly and sympathetic influences. This unselfish practice has been the invariable rule of McKim, Mead & White and is carried on just as extensively to-day by Mr. Mead and his associates."

According to Mr. Granger:

Charles F McKim

"McKim may almost be said to have had no private life. At the age of 25 he married Miss Bigelow of Boston. That marriage was not a happy one and they were later divorced without any breath of scandal being attached to either. Of this marriage there was one daughter, Miss Margaret McKim, who was her father's companion during the later years of his life.

"On June 25, 1885, he married Miss Julia Amory Appleton of Lenox. This marriage gave every promise of most complete happiness to both, but was only shortlived owing to the death of Mrs. McKim in 1887. In her memory he founded the Julia Amory Appleton Fellowship in Architecture at Harvard, which provides an annual stipend of $1,000 for a travelling student.

"He also may be said to have had no fixed abiding place. He builded for his friends many beautiful houses, of which the most beautiful in my judgment is the Kane house on the northwest corner of Fifth avenue and Forty-ninth street, New York, but, like the cobbler of old, he never had time to build a home for himself."

Mr. McKim indeed never had time to do anything for his own personal advancement or gratification, but lived and worked for others.

Mr. Granger has had no letters to work from in writing this biography. Mr. McKim hated to write letters. "He might be said to have had the telegraph habit, so constantly did he use the wire even when to do so was almost a luxury, but unfortunately telegrams are seldom if ever kept."

Characteristics of Mr. McKim were his modesty and his enthusiasm for helping young men to develop in the profession of architecture. To quote again from Mr. Granger:

"So many anecdotes have been told me, full of the personality and charm, the purity and integrity of the man, that it is hard to select among them those which most vividly portray him. Such personalities are rare in any profession, in any nation, and the main object in the writing of this memoir is to bring before the younger men in his profession, who were born too late to have known him personally, but have seen and are seeing the distinguished work which has been and is being done by the firm which he founded to carry on the great tradition of a noble architecture, a knowledge of the man himself, who lived and died to establish this tradition in America.

"The last few years of McKim's life were clouded by sickness and sorrow. Saint Gaudens and White preceded him, and he never quite recovered from their loss, but he fought bravely on against serious physical disability, planning, directing and encouraging until the end."

Charles Follen McKim was born at Isabella Furnace, Chester county, Pa., on August 24, 1847. His father was a stern abolitionist and political reformer and his mother a noted Quaker beauty, "a woman of great charm and simplicity," which, Mr. Granger thinks, "accounts for the absolute purity, one might almost say severity, of his [McKim's] taste and judgment and also for the determination with which he invariably carried his point, once convinced in his own mind, against every kind of opposition and often against the expressed preferences and wishes of his clients."

Little is known of Mr. McKim's childhood and early youth. He received his early education at a school in Perth Amboy, N. J., where his father sent him because of the strong anti-slavery sympathies of the headmaster. Later he studied at the Lawrence Scientific School in the mining department, and then at the School of Mines in Paris. It was while in the office of Russell Sturgis that he showed a decided natural leaning toward architecture. Later he studied with H. H. Richardson, to whom he never forgot his indebtedness. In 1872 he left Mr. Richardson's office and joined forces with Mr. Mead and a firm was established under the name of McKim, Mead & Bigelow, which continued in existence until the withdrawal of Mr. Bigelow:

"At this time Stanford White was working in the Richardson office, and had already shown evidences of that brilliancy of design which distinguished his entire career. The three men had discovered that sympathy in taste and ideas which made their future work so brilliant and so consistent, and in 1879 Stanford White was invited to come in with them, and thus was born the firm of McKim, Mead & White.

"That this combination was an ideal one and that conditions in New York were ready to receive the output of such a combination of talent was evidenced by their almost instant success. These three men kept before them the high standard of their calling, and, living up to this standard in the midst of modern business conditions, that their business steadily increased until the volume of their work became stupendous and their clientele nationwide makes their success more remarkable and almost unique.

"I have said before that they worked together in such close harmony that in most cases it is impossible to differentiate the work of any one of the three, but until his death the spirit of McKim was the spirit of the firm, and his confreres gladly accorded to him the position of the leader."

It is safe to say that a majority of the most beautiful buildings in New York were designed by McKim, Mead & White. Among the latest was J. P. Morgan's library. To quote Mr. Granger:

"Here was an opportunity for every form of lavish expenditure, for this was the private toy of a multimillionaire who never discussed the price when gratifying his desires. Again I must appeal to photographs to give any really clear idea of the beauty of this exquisite building, but even well taken photographs cannot show the color harmonies within and without.

"In this building restraint and discrimination are carried to the nth power. These are the two characteristics which American architecture most sadly lacks, and in a careful and exhaustive study of the Morgan library, as a whole and in detail, one strengthens the belief that no great architecture can exist without them."

Mr. Morgan gave Mr. McKim a free hand to do anything he liked, which shows what the great financier's opinion was of the great architect. I have no doubt that Mr. McKim did some things that Mr. Morgan did not altogether like, for he had a habit of changing his mind if he thought it was for the betterment of his work.

There is no more beautiful monument to the memory of either Mr. Morgan or Mr. McKim than this library on Thirty-sixth street.

Fires a Shot of Light.

There is one kind of pistol that can be carried despite the stringency of the Sullivan law. It has not a bullet about it, although it does contain a cartridge that is not blank. The cartridge is a small electric storage battery.

If a light is needed while going to the cellar or to find the number on a house door on a dark night or to see what time it is when you wake up in the dark, just pull the trigger and a shaft of light is cast upon the object toward which the muzzle of the pistol is directed. The "gun" has a cigar lighting attachment, too, which is of more or less use. The pistol is small.

A Night Lamp.

When it is necessary to keep a light burning all night do not cover your electric lamp with paper or other substance to dim its rays. That is the way to lose money. Buy a little fellow—eight or four or even lower candle power. It will save its cost many times over if you have to use it much. They are made in tints, too, so as to soften the light.

Mrs. Russell Sage at the Age of Eighteen

How she looked as Miss Margarete Olivia Slocum.

In Biography Alfred Hoyt Granger Tells How Architect Helped Revolutionize Taste in Buildings and Assisted Young Men to Arrive

Why He Gave Up a Consular Career

By a Former American Vice-Consul.

Discouragements Met by Young Men Who Have the Ambition to Serve the United States Abroad

I ADMIT frankly that my chief reason for entering the consular service was to gratify a desire to go to Europe. Up to the time when I began my duties as a clerk in the Department of State at Washington my information with regard to the consular service was about as complete as that of the average college graduate.

Even after I had learned something above the duties of an American consul the thing that appealed to me was a temporary foreign residence rather than the office that I needed to realize my ambition to take a post-graduate travel course. By the time my wanderlust was satisfied I had acquired a real taste for consular work and I gave it up only when I found that I could no longer afford the luxury of my station.

Contrary to my expectations, it was a comparatively easy matter to obtain my appointment as clerk in the American consulate at ——. My knowledge of languages and experience in the Department of State were the chief things in my favor. As is customary I was made vice-consul almost as soon as I reached my post of duty. I knew that vice-consuls were entitled to travelling expenses (mileage), while clerks were not, but I was only too glad to go out as a clerk when the opportunity presented itself.

It didn't take me more than a few weeks to find out that my new duties were very agreeable and that I should like to make a consular career the chief business of my life. At the same time I realized that I must look forward to a long period of apprenticeship at a small salary and that I would be eligible for retirement at old age or sooner without a pension, meanwhile having to live abroad constantly in order to live at all.

For one who appreciates the advantages of daily contact with the people and institutions of a foreign country the life of a vice-consul affords ideal opportunities. While I acted as the official secretary of my chief, the consul, my commission as vice-consul gave me the right to exercise "all the functions or powers" of the consul whenever the latter was temporarily absent from duty. In the course of my two years tenure that opportunity presented itself frequently enough to give me the sense of responsibility that was necessary to make my work thoroughly enjoyable.

Attention to commercial inquiries from American exporters and the performance of all manner of notarial acts for my visiting countrymen constituted my daily routine. Interceding in behalf of naturalized citizens who had been arrested for alleged non-performance of military duties prior to their emigration to America and investigating the status of minor legatees of American fortunes—the unusual things occurring in a consul's life—these were the elements that made the consular service such an attractive field for me. It was all the more enjoyable because I realized that I might be called upon at any time to do something that only my superior was supposed to know how to do.

These moments of real responsibility are the Vice-Consul's chief recompense for the vain hope of being promoted speedily to a consulate. I did not give up the idea of a consular career until I had analyzed my prospects carefully. I made it a point to call at the consulate in most of the cities that I visited with a view to learning the opinions of other men in the service.

Not a single subordinate officer with whom I got acquainted was enthusiastic about his prospects. The few who hoped to remain in the service permanently said that they intended doing so only because they were too old to be able to afford to change their vocation. Several of these men had passed the consular service examination and were eligible for promotion to the grade of consul. All of them were men of some education who liked their work and took it seriously. It seemed to me that most of them had higher ideals perhaps than the average American youth who begins to figure values in dollars and cents at an early age.

Not the least discouraging information that I collected was the advice of the superior officers. More than one consul told me that he would give up his position to-morrow if he could get something to do at home at a fair salary for a man of his experience.

Finally it should be borne in mind that my conclusions regarding the undesirability of a consular career were formed at a time when a candidate for the Presidential nomination in the United States was publicly declaring his faith in the spoils system of appointment to positions in the foreign service.

And still I thought I should like to remain in the service. The only way that I could hope to be promoted was to go to Washington and take the consular examination. But it is hard to save enough money out of a salary of $1,000 a year to make a round trip to Washington from the interior of Europe. The only way for me to get home at the Government's expense was by resigning my position, for "consuls and vice and deputy consular officers are entitled to additional compensation of 5 cents a mile in going to and returning from their posts, except in connection with leaves of absence."

After I had returned to the United States and found my former associates in good salaried positions my paltry thousand a year looked smaller than ever to me. I decided that I owed it to myself to try to do better than that in my own country. And my expectations have been fully realized, although I found out at the start that my two years experience abroad in a position of responsibility had practically no sales value in the American employment market.

This circumstance does not, however, cause me to discount that particular aspect of my consular venture. I attribute it solely to the appalling ignorance of the average American citizen with regard to the consular service.

The best that I could have hoped for had I taken the consular examination would have been an appointment as a consular assistant. This grade of consular officer is generally assigned to temporary duty at one of the larger consulates, where he is made a Vice or Deputy Consul, or sometimes placed in charge. The salary for the first three years is $1,000 per annum; after that it increases $200 each year till a maximum of $1,800 is reached. In the meantime the assistant is eligible for promotion to the grade of Consul.

I know several industrious and clever men who passed the examination with a good grade five and six years ago and are still subordinates. Instead of being appointed Consuls they have to give way to new men from States that lack their full quota of appointees in the service. Thus during my term as Vice-Consul practically all new consular appointees were inexperienced men from Southern States.

Furthermore, it was commonly understood among consular officers that certain new appointees had been allowed to take the examination at frequent intervals until they finally passed, and were then promptly promoted from the bottom of the long and distinguished list of eligibles. Of course so long as the consular service is not under civil rules except by executive order it is not expected that such conditions will be impossible. But they certainly do not encourage serious minded young men to enter the consular service.

Am I sorry that I turned down a consular career after the two years start I had in it? No, but I certainly regret that I had to turn it down.

If American commercial houses estimate that a young American's services are worth at least $2,000 the first year that he is stationed abroad, why shouldn't the Government at Washington be willing to do its share to foster a better esprit de corps in its money saving and money making foreign commercial intelligence bureau?